

Buckland Bank, Balmer Huff and Balmer Down

Prehistoric pottery from field walking and
excavations

by
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Technical report 17

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(text commissioned by Judie English, University of Sussex)

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All of the areas surveyed yielded numerically significant quantities of prehistoric pottery. The assemblages comprise mostly featureless body sherds, highly weathered in the case of the field walked material, unweathered in that of the excavated material. The traditions to which they belong are identifiable primarily through analogy with fabrics and fabric suites known from sites elsewhere in the county. Owing to the lack of clear stratification, a number of sherds in similar fabrics that occurred in different traditions were impossible to distinguish. Four broad groups, however, are definitely present: 'early' post Deverel-Rimbury (*hereafter* PDR), dated to the Late Bronze Age, 'late' PDR, dated to the end of the Late Bronze Age or the beginning of the Early Iron Age, saucepan pottery, dated to the Middle Iron Age, and East Sussex grog-tempered ware (East Sussex Ware), early variants of which occur both immediately before and immediately after the Roman conquest. In addition a handful of sherds suggest the possibility of proximate Deverel-Rimbury (Middle Bronze Age) and slightly later Early Iron Age activity. (For discussions of all of these traditions in Sussex see: Green 1980; Hamilton 1993; Seager Thomas 2005, 85, table 2; and Seager Thomas 2008).

Early post Deverel-Rimbury

Most early PDR fabrics locally are flint-tempered. As the tradition developed, however, a wide range of new fabrics was added to them. PDR flint-tempered fabrics were present throughout the survey area but only around Balmer Huff did they occur by themselves. This site is less than a kilometre away from Plumpton Plain B. Consisting of mostly undecorated PDR pottery but incorporating some developed forms, the pottery assemblage from Plumpton Plain B is assigned to the end of an early 'plain ware' phase of the tradition, dated to between 1150 and 950 cal BC, and it is suggested that the group from Balmer Huff is of broadly similar date. This early date is supported by the presence within the assemblage of two sherds in a coarsely flint-tempered fabric that could belong to either the PDR or the preceding Deverel-Rimbury pottery tradition.

Late post Deverel-Rimbury

The principal ceramic marker for this period locally is a range of sparsely flint tempered fabrics with glauconite/ pisolithic iron oxide inclusions, absent from assemblages of PDR plain wares, such as that from Plumpton Plain B, but present in abundance in later, decorated assemblages like those from the Caburn and Hollingbury Camp. These late PDR assemblages belong to a period *after* 800 cal BC. Three sherds from or associated with this group are of particular note — a fragment of decorated 'Caburn' ware and part of a round shouldered jar or bowl of later Early Iron Age type, both in glauconitic fabrics (Figs 1.2 & 1.1), a thick combed sherd, also in a glauconitic fabric (cf. nearby

Patcham Fawcett: Seager Thomas 2008, fig. 10.5) (Fig. 1.3), and a fingertip impressed shoulder in a wholly grog-tempered fabric new to Sussex but widespread in contemporary continental assemblages (Fig. 1.5). The distribution of sparsely flint-tempered glauconitic fabrics was focused on Buckland Bank II, but they were present in small quantities across the whole of the survey area.

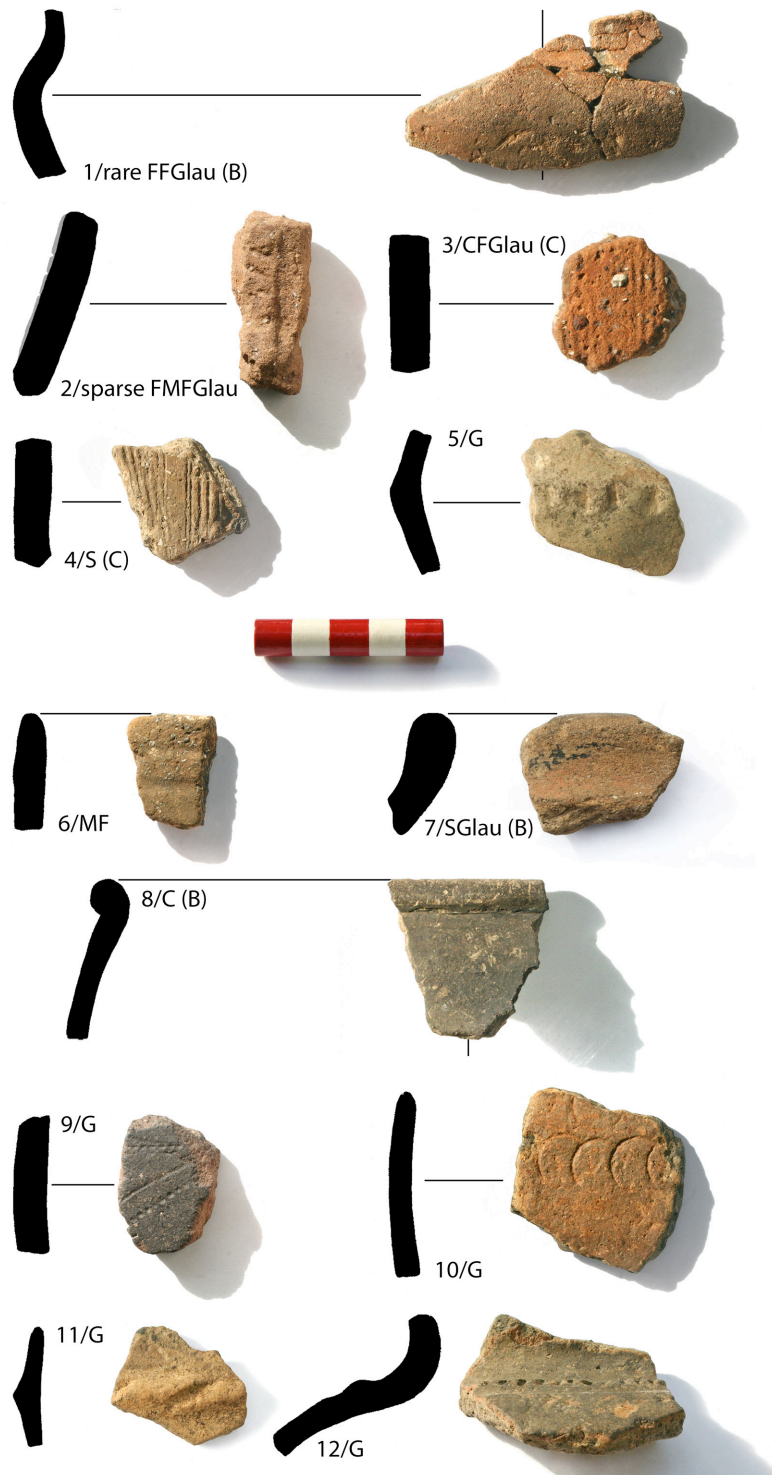


Figure 1. Pottery from the survey. 1–5 late post Deverel-Rimbury (LBA/EIA); 5–8 Middle Iron Age; 9–12 East Sussex Grog-tempered ware (LIA/RB)

Saucepan and associated pottery

Two fabrics, shelly and glauconitic, dominate the Middle Iron Age assemblage. Both have close late PDR fabric parallels within the assemblage as a whole but their later credentials within the survey area are vouchsafed for by their isolation within a number of otherwise unambiguous Middle Iron Age sherd groups, by a distinctly Middle Iron Age rim sherd in an analogous shelly *and* glauconitic fabric (Fig. 1.7), and by close parallels in stratified assemblages of saucepan pottery from other East Sussex sites, notably Bishopstone, the Caburn and Norton. Also present are two actual saucepan pot rims, one in a flint-tempered fabric, unusual in East Sussex assemblages but recurrent in those from West Sussex (Fig. 1.6), and one in a widespread East Sussex fabric (calcite) (Fig. 1.8). Saucepan pottery is currently dated to between the 4th and the end of the 2nd centuries cal BC. The bulk of this material comes from the area of Allcroft and Tom's excavations and the field walked fields immediately adjacent to it.

East Sussex grog-tempered ware

The greater part of the assemblage comprises East Sussex grog-tempered ware (East Sussex Ware). Given the number and range of Roman sherds recovered from the survey area a large proportion of these are likely to be Romano-British. Many of the chronologically diagnostic feature sherds, however, are of types that straddle the conquest and some of these might be of Late Iron Age date. These include finger-tipped cordons, tooled chevrons and 'eyebrow' motifs (Fig. 1.9), circular stamps (Fig. 1.10). etc. Large assemblages of East Sussex grog-tempered ware were recovered from all areas of the survey except Balmer Down, with the densest concentration, which includes many diagnostically early sherds, focusing on the interface between Buckland Bank II and Buckland Bank III, close to the area identified above as a focus of Middle Iron Age pottery.

Interpretative implications

Coming from an area, which, with exception of the excavations on Plumpton Plain, is under-studied ceramically the prehistoric assemblage from the survey area fills a yawning gap in the known distributions of Late Bronze Age/ Early Iron Age, Middle Iron Age and Late Iron Age/ Early Romano-British activity locally.

Its distribution and relationship to the (mostly) earlier occupation on Plumpton Plain highlights the spatial separation locally of different phases of activity during the later second and first millennia BC: Middle and Late Bronze Age on Plumpton Plain and Balmer Huff; Late Bronze Age/ Early Iron Age and Middle and Late Iron Age on the spur of Buckland Bank. The ceramic repertoire during all four periods shows activity to have been intimately related to that on other contemporary Sussex sites, probably through trade and exchange of the widespread and non-local fabrics.

Finally, and most importantly in ceramic terms, the assemblage holds a clue to the nature of the Early Iron Age locally.

Although definitive Park Brow-Caesar's Camp, the ceramic tradition conventionally associated with this period in Sussex is absent, the use of shelly

and glauconitic fabrics within the survey area shows there to have been continuity locally in pottery procurement/ manufacture *through* the Early and Middle parts of the Iron Age. This view is supported by the recovery from the survey area of sherds in these fabrics with Early Iron Age affinities ([Figs. 1.3 & 1.4](#)).

(August 2008)

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